NEIGHBORHOOD ACTION INITIATIVE

Engaging Citizens in Real Change

Upon taking office in 1999, the administration recognized three fundamental realities: the city's service delivery systems were profoundly broken, citizens were distrustful of government leaders, and many had lost hope that it was possible to fix the government of the District of Columbia. The administration determined that to rebuild the District of Columbia not only needed to focus on the basics – better services, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization, among others – citizens should be fully involved in every aspect as a part of rebuilding faith in the District's leadership, managers, and employees.

The administration also realized that the challenges facing the District were too great for government to overcome alone. Government must be accountable, but local businesses, foundations, non-profit and faith-based organizations, and citizens themselves must also do their part.

Out of this challenge was born the Neighborhood Action Initiative. Neighborhood Action is Mayor Williams' commitment to involve District residents in improving their communities by effectively mobilizing and directing community resources. It includes the Neighborhood Planning Initiative, which helps communities develop the Neighborhood Improvement Plan, and the Neighborhood Services Initiative, which brings community members together to ensure services result in tangible improvements, both of which are described in more detail later in this chapter.

Building a Strategic Management Cycle and a Strategic Plan

The first step was to create a strategic plan that integrates the visions, aspirations and experiences of community members with the knowledge and expertise of DC government officials and staff. This plan, *Turning Ideas Into Action*, incorporates cross-cutting themes that reflect the critical needs and important opportunities facing the District, span across the mission of particular agencies, and are driven by broad support from citizens in every part of the city.

The plan's design process also began rebuilding the trust of citizens in their government.

On November 20, 1999 Mayor Williams held the first Citizen Summit, a powerful, 3,000-person event that framed the strategic plan for 2000-2001. This event committed citizens and their leaders to an effective foundation for change around five major priorities. These are:

- Strengthening Families, Children, Youth and Individuals;
- Building and Sustaining Healthy Neighborhoods;
- Promoting Economic Development;
- Making Government Work; and
- Enhancing Unity of Purpose and Democracy.

Mayor Williams believes that the strategic plan is a key component of the District's Strategic Management Cycle – a two-year, results-based set of sequenced actions and outcomes that drive implementation and change.

Figure 3-1

Strategic Management Cycle

The Strategic Management Cycle:

- Ensures that the Strategic Plan drives budget and resource allocation decisions;
- Creates a framework for implementation and accountability and is linked to personal performance contracts and Departmental scorecards;
- Fosters internal realignment and reinvention within District agencies in support of District-wide goals;
- Ensures the Strategic Plan both drives and integrates strategic plans at other levels; and
- Ensures the strategic plan is regularly renewed.

In the District of Columbia, the strategic management cycle is a two-year process in which Citizen Summits are the capstone, serving as both the starting and ending point.

Therefore, in October 2001, almost exactly two years since the first Citizen Summit, the Mayor will convene another large, demographically representative gathering of DC citizens to spend a day reviewing the state of the District in order to revitalize and refocus the strategic direction of the city. The difference this year is that citizens, through their participation in the Neighborhood Planning and Neighborhood Services Initiatives will be bringing neighborhood priorities to the task. The results of that day will then be directly incorporated into the Mayor's 2002 Strategic Plan, which will become the basis for his 2003 budget proposal. The Strategic Plan and budget then will become the framework for crafting performance agreements and scorecard targets.

Building from Best Practices, Creating New Best Practices

While the Neighborhood Action Initiative is informed by a set of innovations and best practices from a variety of venues and sectors, the overall initiative is beginning to attract national notice itself.

Neighborhood Action has been recognized by the:

- International Association for Public Participation, which gave Neighborhood Action its highest honor in 2000, Project of the Year; and
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has developed an extensive effort to identify, recognize, and publicize best practices, selected Neighborhood Action as "The Best of the Best," one of 100 projects recognized nationally.

Both of these awards recognized Neighborhood Action for the way it has begun to combine several elements in a unique manner. These include:

- **Linking Public Involvement Directly to the Strategic Plan and Budget**. Many citizen involvement efforts are largely talk sessions, which do not impact city policy and budget. When citizens see that talk sessions did not lead to real change, their cynicism about government is reinforced and often deepens. Here, Neighborhood Action drew its lessons from innovative, community-wide strategic planning processes in Roanoke, Virginia, Savannah, Georgia, and Houston, Texas. Each of these efforts were large-scale community participation processes that led to real change.
- **Using Technology to Support Large-Scale Participatory Processes**. Technology has only recently become effective and affordable that it can be used in public processes. Here, Neighborhood Action drew most heavily from lessons learned by Americans Discuss Social Security, a Pew Charitable Trust funded, national effort that engaged citizens in electronic town meetings to discuss the future of social security.
- **Linking Citywide Planning with Neighborhood Planning**. Few cities have sought to initiate neighborhood planning efforts citywide as a means of informing citywide strategic plans and budget. Those that have, such as St. Paul, Minnesota and Dayton, Ohio have largely done so through formal, neighborhood-based bodies, a process they and others have recognized as unduly cumbersome. Here, Neighborhood Action is creating the next generation of linkages, drawing from the observations of other cities.
- **Linking Performance Management, Service Delivery Innovations and Strategic Planning**. Service issues, planning, and performance management programs are usually conducted in separate silos in city government. For example, Charlotte, North Carolina, Sunnyvale, California, and Phoenix, Arizona have long been recognized for their performance management and measurement programs, but none of these are explicitly linked to citizen engagement strategies. Service delivery innovations such as cross-functional, multi-agency work teams have been used in Rochester, New York, Hampton, Virginia, San Diego, California, and elsewhere, but these are rarely linked to planning and performance management, as is starting to happen here.

What brings these strategies together in the District of Columbia is the way that each of them plays a central role in rebuilding trust in government. As noted in the report published by the National Academy of Public Administration, *A Government to Trust and Respect: Rebuilding Citizen-Government Relations for the 21st Century*, rebuilding the relationship between citizens and their government must be a top priority for all management and service innovations. Here, Neighborhood Action has built on successes in other communities and uniquely combined these experiences for the District of Columbia.
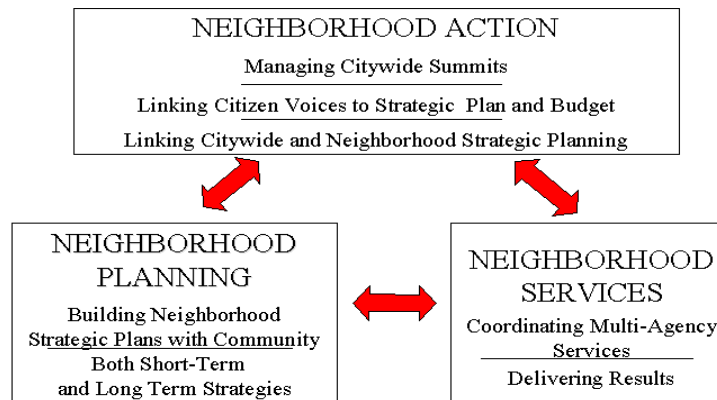
Building the Neighborhood Action Triangle

In approaching the first Citizen Summit, the Mayor and his team were largely starting without a foundation. A prior District-wide, comprehensive strategic plan did not exist. The notion of a Strategic Management Cycle was new to many managers. Mechanisms to deliver on cross-cutting themes were not in place.

With the implementation of the strategic plan, a series of robust initiatives, programs and actions were developed and linked together to work toward the goals of the strategic plan. In addition to Neighborhood Action serving as an integrating framework for all of these efforts, it also serves as the integrating framework for two partner initiatives – the Neighborhood Planning Initiative and the Neighborhood Services Initiative. Together, they are commonly described as the Neighborhood Action Triangle.

Figure 3-2

Neighborhood Action Triangle

Resourcing the Neighborhood Action Triangle

These three initiatives engage personnel from a broad spectrum of DC agencies, with core functions housed in the Office of the City Administrator, the Office of the Chief of Staff, and the Office of Planning. Together, these initiatives provide a platform of experience, action, and results that now need to inform the work of District officials and citizens as the second round of the Strategic Management Cycle is jointly formulated.

The staffing, management, and leadership of the three components of the Neighborhood Action Triangle creates mutual support and action mechanisms. At the ward level, the work is anchored by:

- **Ward-Based Core Teams**. Each ward has a core team of representatives from all of the participating agencies with significant latitude to commit agency resources and promote expedited decision making whenever possible. The Wards 1 and 7 Core Teams started in July 2000. The remainder started in December 2000. Core teams work primarily with the Neighborhood Services Initiative. Members of the core team representing agencies who focus on planning issues will work with the Neighborhood Planning Initiative.

- **Neighborhood Service Coordinators (NSCs)**. Eight NSCs provide leadership to the core team. Substantively, they take a lead role in tracking persistent problem areas, developing work plans to tackle the persistent problem areas, and implementing those plans – all in partnership with their core team. Neighborhood Service Coordinators are housed in the Office of the City Administrator.
- **Neighborhood Planning Coordinators (NPCs)**. Eight NPCs play a leadership role in developing Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAPs) for each of the neighborhood clusters in their ward. They work closely with the Neighborhood Service Coordinators in ensuring that Neighborhood Service work plans are strategic and linked to longer-term efforts to sustain the improvements and create long-lasting change. NPCs are vital and active members of their Core Team. Neighborhood Planning Coordinators are housed in the Office of Planning.
- **Neighborhood Outreach Coordinators (NOCs)**. Housed in the Office of the Public Advocate, Neighborhood Outreach Coordinators support the engagement of District citizens from all parts of the community to support every part of the Neighborhood Action triangle. Neighborhood Outreach Coordinators also perform functions related to other elements of the mission of the Office of the Public Advocate.

Neighborhood Service Planning, and Outreach Coordinators comprise a "management team" for each ward, working closely with each other and their team members. Within the administration, neighborhood action is guided by:

- **Neighborhood Services Leadership Team**. Comprised of agency deputy directors from each participating agency as well as senior staff from the District's Customer Service Initiative guide the Neighborhood Services Initiative.
- **Interagency Planning Council**. The Office of Planning is developing an Interagency Planning Council that will guide the Neighborhood Planning Initiative and will work collaboratively with the Neighborhood Services Initiative. It will shape capital improvements, land use, public facilities, and other long-range planning and improvement efforts at the neighborhood level. The Interagency Planning Council will also work with citywide private, public-private and non-profit entities that support planning and investment in neighborhoods.

In all of Neighborhood Action's efforts, citizens and other stakeholders are essential partners:

- **Community Partners.** Community partners are central to the success of every element of the Neighborhood Action Initiative. One of the first steps in addressing any persistent problem and in developing a Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan is engaging neighborhood leaders in efforts to tailor the process to their neighborhoods.

  Community partners include:

  - Citizens;
  - Youth;
  - Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners;
  - Faith-based Organizations;
  - Community-based Organizations;

- Neighborhood Associations;
- Civic Associations;
- Citizen Associations; and
- Local Businesses.

Teamwork, whether it be between a civic association and a core team or among staff from different agencies, is the driving spirit among these partners. Some of the teamwork is informal, other aspects of the work require more formalized protocols.

The Office of Neighborhood Action

The Office of Neighborhood Action is the lynchpin in the Neighborhood Action triangle. The office takes lead responsibility for the Citizen Summit and other summits, manages and catalyzes the linkages between Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans, agency strategic plans, and the citywide Strategic Plan, and plays a supportive role in the other elements of the Strategic Management Cycle.

In order to remain a lean, flexible entity, the Office retains a small staff which is supplemented by staff from other parts of DC government and consultants on an as-needed basis.

Leading Citywide Summits and Facilitating the Strategic Planning Process

A successful citywide Citizen Summit is an enormous undertaking. It takes approximately six months for a small team of full-time individuals complemented by dozens of individuals with specific logistical and other roles to staff a Citizen Summit and develop the Strategic Plan. Some of the major tasks included:

- Facilitated two cabinet retreats that led to the draft Strategic Plan that was presented to citizens at the summit;
- Summarized the draft Strategic Plan into a citizen-friendly, four-page newspaper for use at the summit;
- Organized the November 1999 Citizen Summit;
- Summarized community comments and a set of themes for consideration by the Mayor and his senior leadership team;
- Held mini-summits with employees;
- Facilitated a cabinet retreat to make modifications to the Strategic Plan;
- Led the January 2000 Neighborhood Action Forum which reviewed the proposed changes to the Strategic Plan and began the groundwork of the Neighborhood Planning Initiative; and
- Worked with other Administration staff in summarizing the Strategic Plan into a 28-page citizen-friendly report.

Following this intense process of strategic plan development, the Office of Neighborhood Action:

- Assisted in the design and delivery of workshops to familiarize employees with the performance management framework;
- Deployed consultants to assist in the startup of the Neighborhood Services Initiative and the Neighborhood Planning Initiative; and

- Began preparations for a Youth Summit to bring the voices of youth into the strategic planning process and the development of specific action steps.

Youth Summit

Every young person deserves a fair chance at life. In Washington, D.C. today too many young people do not have sufficient support from their families, schools, and community to adequately prepare them for adulthood.

On November 20, 2000, a demographically representative group of 1,400 youth between the ages of 14 and 21 came together to identify their priorities and solutions to the challenges facing young people in our community. The youth selected safety and violence, education, and jobs and training as the three areas most needing immediate public and private investment in the District. Mayor Williams' FY2002 budget proposal reflects those high priority strategies identified by youth and adults most likely to have the highest impact on these three issues in the next two years. These program priorities will become part of the Strategic Management Cycle and will be reflected in agency performance contracts and scorecards, just like the outcomes of the Citizen Summit in 1999.

In addition, Mayor Williams will create a Youth Advisory Council to ensure that young people will have an ongoing voice in the issues that directly impact their lives. The Chief of Police will create a Youth Advisory Board to work with the Metropolitan Police Department. Other District agencies that directly interface with youth will create a board to ensure the Youth Voices are an on-going influence in policy development and resource allocation.

Heading Toward Citizen Summit II

The range of activities catalyzed by the first Citizen Summit as well as information gained from completing the first round of the Strategic Management Cycle, lays the groundwork for the second Citizen Summit and the subsequent budget proposal.

Inputs into the Citizen Summit II will include:

- Lessons and feedback from activities undertaken in the first Strategic Management Cycle;
- Themes and resource requests from 39 completed Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAPs);
- Lessons and resource requests from the Neighborhood Service Initiative, which are informed by the development and implementation of workplans;
- Preliminary drafts of agency strategic plans; and
- Macro-economic, development, and planning recommendations from the forthcoming CityVision 2010, a long-term growth plan being developed by the Office of Planning.

Staff will be consolidating this data as a major input for upcoming Cabinet retreats and, ultimately, Citizens Summit II.

The Neighborhood Services Initiative

Pilot tested in Wards 1 and 7 in July 2000, and expanded to all wards in December 2000, Neighborhood Services Initiative put a new face on District government with Neighborhood Service Coordinators leading cross-agency teams in each of the city's eight wards. The Initiative has had far reaching impact:

- "Persistent problem areas," often the toughest, most interwoven sets of problems and pathologies found on a neighborhood block or set of blocks, are the focus of exciting partnerships between District government employees and residents. After ameliorating the problems, the partners then implement a strategy to keep the problems from returning. Several of these persistent problem areas have been attacked in the "prototypes" in Wards 1 and 7 and are being followed with many others in the coming months, citywide.

- District employees are experiencing a new culture of cooperation, accountability, and a framework for action to systematically work together, plan together, and act together to achieve concrete results. This element of the initiative not only supports near-term tangible results, it builds the foundation for a high-performance, team-based culture throughout District government.

This approach, was developed based on comprehensive analysis of historical District government dysfunction and efforts to address it. Some of this dysfunction is common to any large, general-purpose government. And some is uniquely our own.

Understanding the Problem

In the District, the disinvestment and decline of scheduled services earlier in the decade resulted in significant growth in persistent problem areas. Persistent problem areas are comprised of multiple, interwoven issues. For example, a persistent problem area might have accumulated trash, abandoned cars, drug runners and dealers that use the abandoned cars to store their drugs, rats that thrive on the garbage, and deteriorated curb and gutter. Persistent problem areas require attention by multiple agencies in order to be effectively addressed. Yet, agencies of DC government, like many governments, historically tend to operate alone when delivering services – making government a collection of "stovepipes" or "silos" unable to deal well with tough and complex problems that require a cross-agency response. The result is a tangle of dysfunction.

When District agencies fail to respond to neighborhood problems, residents often find it difficult, if not impossible, to find the various persons responsible for action. Front-line workers who want to solve problems have little recourse if other agency personnel fail to help when needed. The workers keep returning to the sites of chronic problems, frustrated to be addressing only symptoms and not causes. They expend significant effort with little to show.

Further, without an appropriate venue for developing coordinated responses at an operational level, multi-agency issues too often end up in the Mayor's office or City Council offices, where the situation is further aggravated. A new workflow streams down to agencies from elected officials: These directives typically overtake other priorities, satisfying some citizens but often disrupting services of others, thereby creating other dissatisfied citizens, and the cycle repeats.

A review of the numbers tells the story. In 1999, the Office of the Mayor was receiving nearly 440 requests from constituents **each day** (13,200 a month), the majority of which (ranging from 61 to 75 percent) were misdirected or unfulfilled requests for agency services. Many requests remained outstanding after 90 days due to unaccountable agency contacts and unreliable or non-existent methods of follow-up. Rarely was contact with the constituent made during these 90 days, regardless of whether action was taken on the request or not. Not surprisingly, approximately 25 to 50 percent of requests were resubmitted because dissatisfied constituents reinitiated the process.

This challenge led to two responses. The first focused on customer service philosophy. The second reflected the lack of interactive coordination and accountability of agency staff.

Customer Service Philosophy

To achieve customer satisfaction, the District has clearly defined gold standard customer service to include the whole service delivery chain – from the intake of citizen service requests to feedback on how services were provided. Four elements underlie the District's customer service model: responsiveness, accountability, transparency, and a customer service infrastructure.

Responsiveness to all forms of constituent inquiry is essential to achieving customer satisfaction and is therefore mandated in the District through executive order (follow-up contact within 48 hours of receipt of correspondence).

The District utilizes a variety of management and technology tools to track and improve responsiveness to correspondence as well as adherence to customer service protocol and timeliness and quality of service delivery, among others. Performance reports are now standard part of the District's management culture. In this way, employees are and expect to be held accountable for the quality and manner in which they deliver services and information to constituents.

Transparency refers to the desired openness with which the District shares information about decisions, processes and performance with its constituents. The Mayor's performance scorecards on key initiatives and his press conference around their results exemplify the expectation set for all District employees and operations.

A customer service infrastructure is needed to permanently change the District's culture and operations to one that focuses on customer satisfaction. The customer service infrastructure will affect human resource process, technology and data systems, performance measurement programs, and communication departments and vehicles, among others. Policies to govern the expected outcomes of these and other infrastructure changes will be the driver of changing how the District conducts business.

Customer Service Policies

To reach our citywide customer service goals, the Office of the City Administrator has established a Customer Service Unit. This unit is charged with ensuring that customer service policies permeate every level of the District government. To this end, a Customer Service Council has been established to assist in developing, tailoring, and overseeing service delivery initiatives within agencies and District-wide. The members of the Service Council (representatives of each Cabinet-level agency), make customer service decisions for their agencies and are held accountable for their agencies' performance.

Customer Service Solutions

The Williams administration's focus on customer satisfaction has already revolutionized service/information delivery in the District of Columbia. The Mayor's Citywide Call Center (CWCC) and the District's website best exemplify the Mayor's approach.

The CWCC provides one telephone number for residents to use to reach any District employee, to submit requests for city services, receive information about city operations, and provide opinions and feed back on any government issue. With a click of a mouse, these same features

are available from the District's website. The website also provides links to detailed agency web pages, simulcasts of public speeches and town-hall meetings from the city's cable television station, on-line government business transactions, and provides the opportunity to e-mail the Mayor directly.

These same vehicles also facilitate constituent feedback about government services. Constituents are urged to share their observations, complaints, and comments with live operators at the CWCC or on line through areas such as "Comments and Feedback" and "Talk to the Mayor." The issues raised by constituents help to identify and target those agencies and services most in need of efficiency improvements. Standardized reports on constituent issues are part of the District's performance measurement process and are used by the Mayor, the City Administrator and the Deputy Mayors to drive the discussion of efficiency, resource allocation and accountability.

What is Neighborhood Services?

The underlying premise of Neighborhood Services is that ward-based, cross-agency teams that work together with the community and "own" their geographic territories – with their unique issues – will be far more effective in resolving issues due to joint understanding and trust-building than the previous stove-piped service delivery systems with little or no community engagement.

Neighborhood Services requires partnership and it begins to place employee empowerment and accountability at the ward level. The Administration wants this initiative to have a profound impact on the way work is done inside the District government, as agencies working on their own and together innovate in their operational approaches to ensure that citizens receive the services they need.

Neighborhood Services is a new approach to neighborhood problems. The primary focus of the cross-agency teams is on the persistently problematic areas registering high levels of community concern and interest, such as drug activity occurring in abandoned buildings or the spillover effects of poor apartment building maintenance in a neighborhood. These chronic problem areas absorb a disproportionate level of effort and resources yet show little improvement. The teams zero in on these areas, developing and implementing work plans to attack them. The work plans not only include sustainability strategies, but often link to longer-term strategies being developed through the Neighborhood Planning Initiative.

Secondarily, for particularly difficult and recurring service problems in their wards, the Neighborhood Service Coordinator works closely with the Mayors' Customer Service Initiative. The Customer Service effort links service requests, received at the Citywide Call Center, with the agency responsible for action; it is also developing protocols and tracking methods for expedited service delivery and follow-up communication by agencies for previously mishandled requests as well as new ones.

These two approaches are a part of the primary strategy to rebuild citizen trust in the ability of District government to deliver services and to deliver better services.

Figure 3-3

Current Agency Partners in NSI
- ✔ DPW
- ✔ MPD
- ✔ Fire & EMS
- ✔ DCRA
- ✔ DOH
- ✔ DPR
- ✔ DHCD
- ✔ OCC
- ✔ Office of Planning
- ✔ Office of the Public Advocate
- ✔ Office of Neighborhood Action

The Neighborhood Services Initiative's (NSI) initial priority has been on creating "clean and safe" environments – linking agencies focused on various aspects of public safety, public health, and cleanliness. The initiative is intended to provide readily visible differences in the neighborhood environment as a first step in rebuilding trust and credibility in government.

A Week in the Life of Neighborhood Services in Ward 1

On Monday, two police Sergeants, a housing inspector and a Fire Marshall gather together to decide what to do in front of an illegal rooming house with a variety of housing code violations; a gambling parlor, brothel and drug distribution center in the basement; a non-working fire-detection system; defective smoke detectors; and only one 'point of egress' for the entire building. As they check with each other and seek advice from their superiors, a Neighborhood Service Coordinator (NSC) locates a city lawyer and briefs the City Administrator's office about what is going on at 1512 Park Rd. Decisions are made on the spot and the neighbors congratulate the team at their next community meeting.

That Thursday night at 7:30 the Ward 1 NSC is explaining to the Quebec St. neighbors all the steps that were taken to abate the problems on Hobart Place. As he finishes, the PSA Sergeant chimes in, describing the work of the Police Department. The SWEEP Inspector adds what she can do about the trash problems and the Ward Planner explains what will happen once new development comes to that area. The successful transformation of the Hobart Place neighborhood creates enthusiasm and disbelief among the Quebec Street neighbors. The residents resolve to organize and end the meeting with renewed hope and optimism. The NSC promises he'll be back.

On a wintry Saturday morning, a seven-year-old boy finishes a street football game on Hobart Place as curious neighbors wonder why there are police officers, fire fighters and Recreation workers right on the street where there used to be drug dealers. The seven-year-old finishes the game and tells the Neighborhood Service Coordinator he's

ready to help clean up the empty lot. The neighbors, many of whom have never met, bring out refreshments, donuts and hot chocolate while approximately 20 adolescents from 7 to 17 years of age sweep, shovel and pick up a dozen bags of trash. A DPW crew chips in with a pick right there, right then.

This is a brief snapshot of the weekly schedule of a Neighborhood Service Coordinator and his team. The ward-based, cross-functional, inter-agency, holistic approach to problem solving is slowly but surely turning around people's perspectives, changing the negative paradigms, and allowing citizens and front line workers to see, hear, and participate with each other in cooperative and refreshingly unorthodox ways. The new city at work.

Jose Sueiro, Ward 1 NSC

Building on Best Practices

As Neighborhood Action sought to develop the Services side of the triangle, it took a hard look at the well-intentioned but disparate and uncoordinated agency efforts. Neighborhood Services not only learned from these previous agency efforts, it moved quickly with the launch of its ward-based, multi-agency teams because it was able to build on them.

**NEIGHBORHOOD
PLANNING INITIATIVE**

✔ Is driven by resident priorities
✔ Plans focus on implementation and action
✔ Plans build from previous planning efforts including DC's Strategic Plan
✔ Plans feed ideas into citywide strategic planning process
✔ Produces Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans

Neighborhood Services particularly benefited by the groundwork laid in the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the Department of Public Works (DPW). MPD leadership introduced its Partnerships for Problem-Solving initiative in July 1999. This five-step collaborative problem-solving process involves neighborhood stakeholders – police officers, community volunteers, and other administration staff – had worked well in the City of Chicago and had been adapted for the District.

DPW's labor-management teams, adapted best practices from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) model in Maine, which sustained successful compliance through up-front partnerships with customers and focusing on problem locations that consume disproportionate enforcement effort. This led to the Clean City Champions program, which involves community members in sustained neighborhood clean-up actions. SWMA also designed

a new "Service District" model, which will move it to a geographically-based, coordination of services approach.

Learning as We Go

One of the bedrock values of Neighborhood Action is a continuous learning process for its participants at all levels. Before the citywide launch, Neighborhood Services and Neighborhood Planning sought to learn from four months of experience with two prototypes in Wards 1 and 7 prior to the citywide rollout in December 2000.

Much was learned from the prototypes. Not only is the scope and depth of the program ambitious, the culture change required of government employees and citizens is profound. Nonetheless, the prototypes prove the whole has the potential to be far greater than the sum of the parts when the effort is made to create congruence and consensus among a diverse community and multiple agencies within government.

The Neighborhood Planning Initiative

Neighborhood planning in the District of Columbia is not new. In fact, some of the best planning efforts within the District have been neighborhood based.

Recognizing this fact, the Neighborhood Planning Initiative is an effort to build upon these successes and address three specific shortcomings of neighborhood planning efforts – shortcomings that can be found here as well as in cities around the country:

- Neighborhood plans are often not fully implemented;
- Different neighborhood planning efforts within the same neighborhood are often not coordinated with each other; and
- Neighborhood plans are often not conducted in such a way that they impact citywide strategic plans and budgets.

The linkages among Neighborhood Planning Initiative, Neighborhood Action, and Neighborhood Services Initiative create a solid foundation for the planning initiative. Without Neighborhood Action, there would not be an effective vehicle for carrying issues forward to the citywide Strategic Plan and budget. Without Neighborhood Services, there would not be an effective vehicle for near-term actions nor a vehicle to drill home the message to citizens that DC government now delivers on services. With the linkages, the Neighborhood Planning Initiative becomes a powerful tool for building and maintaining healthy, safe, and vital neighborhoods.

The Neighborhood Planning Initiative is a core element of the Strategic Management Cycle. Planning in neighborhoods, by citizens, develops neighborhood-based priorities for the upcoming Strategic Plan and budget request as well as immediately actionable tasks.

The heart of the Neighborhood Planning Initiative is a Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan, or SNAP. SNAPs will be completed for each of 39 neighborhood clusters. SNAPs will include:

- A profile of the neighborhood cluster;
- A citizen-developed vision for the neighborhood cluster that includes the essential ingredients for a livable community; and
- Action plans for priority essential ingredients. Action plans will include strategies for near- and medium-term improvements. Some elements of the action plan will receiving funding

and support immediately from District government, other public agencies, businesses, faith-based organizations, and non-profits. Others will generate resource requests to be fed into the District's strategic planning and budgeting process.

The Neighborhood Planning Initiative is not only a concerted effort to reassert the importance of citizen-driven neighborhood planning in the District of Columbia. It firmly links neighborhood issues to citywide strategic planning and budgeting.

Building from Best Practices in Neighborhood Planning

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the District of Columbia's approach to neighborhood planning was seen as a national model – especially when linked to the role of Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners. Ward plans were comprehensive documents, informed by enormous data gathering efforts, and a regular part of the community dialogue. By the mid 1990s, the Office of Planning had lost approximately 85 percent of its staff. Ward planning and neighborhood planning became spotty and pro-forma.

Since the District's heyday in neighborhood planning, jurisdictions around the country have recognized the importance of neighborhood planning and exemplary efforts can be found in large, medium and small cities. Although none are citywide such as the District's and only a few jurisdictions use neighborhood planning processes as an input to citywide strategic planning and resource allocation, there is still much to learn from these efforts.

Some of these programs include:

- **Hampton, Virginia.** Hampton, a city of 120,000 residents in the southeast corner of Virginia, is one of the few jurisdictions that combines neighborhood planning with neighborhood based service delivery. This effort has been nationally recognized and documented. A key lesson from Hampton's success is the way they created a Neighborhood Improvement Fund to fund the implementation of small to medium size projects developed during the neighborhood planning process. This approach helped sustain the momentum and energy that flowed from the neighborhood planning process rather than place all requests into the city budget process – necessitating a delay of one to two years between plan completion and plan implementation.
- **Charlotte, North Carolina.** Charlotte's widely recognized city within a city program has an active neighborhood planning component. Their program is built on customer feedback that indicated that most citizens felt planning processes take far too long. On the basis of this feedback, Charlotte developed a compressed time frame for neighborhood planning. This element of Charlotte's neighborhood planning program specifically informed the District's initiative and stressed the importance of listening to citizen feedback.
- **Orlando, Florida and Orange County, Florida.** Both of these jurisdictions have exemplary neighborhood planning programs that have produced visible and measurable results. The focus on prioritization and action plans within their neighborhood plans informed this initiative.
- **Empowerment Zones.** This federally-funded initiative has supported intense neighborhood planning in jurisdictions around the country. The zones as they are known, offer many lessons on what works and what does not. The most effective zones recognized that each neighborhood has a different set of needs and structured appropriate interventions based upon clear analysis.

The Scope of the Neighborhood Planning Initiative

This is an enormously ambitious agenda. Creating simultaneous plans in 39 different neighborhood groupings between January and September 2001 creates huge resource and logistical challenges. This past year has been spent preparing to meet those challenges; the first such neighborhood forums are just now underway.

It is important to understand the rationale for the timeframe. One of the primary goals of the Neighborhood Planning Initiative is to create a mechanism for residents in every neighborhood to come together to not only address issues in their neighborhood, but to identify neighborhood issues they wish to bring forward to the next Citizen Summit and have addressed in the next Strategic Plan. Given this goal, it is imperative that each neighborhood be a part of this process so that each neighborhood's priorities can be examined as a part of the District's overall strategic planning process.

What Drives the Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan?

The residents of the neighborhood cluster, in collaboration with their partners (such as community based organizations, faith-based organizations, and local businesses), drive the content of the SNAP. But planning is not new for any neighborhood. SNAPs will draw from:

- **The Community's Vision.** Some neighborhoods have worked on developing a vision for the future of their community. In these cases, neighbors will quickly affirm the vision and move on to prioritization and action planning. In most neighborhoods, neighbors will work on defining a community vision. All of the work on vision will be in the context of defining the essential ingredients for a healthy and livable neighborhood.

- **The Comprehensive Plan.** The comprehensive plan, an overall policy document, is informed by citizen input and approved by the City Council. The comprehensive plan guides land use and zoning and contains policy statements on many other critical elements. A plan for each ward is incorporated as a part of the comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan and the ward plans will be elements of what is fed forward into the planning processes. The outcomes of the SNAPs will inform the upcoming amendments to the comprehensive plan in 2002.

- **The District's Strategic Plan.** The District's Strategic Plan establishes a set of priorities that need to be considered in the development of SNAPs. In particular, neighborhood-based actions representing the first four substantive themes of the Strategic Plan should be represented in every SNAP.

- **Previous and Ongoing Community Planning Efforts.** Many neighborhoods have an array of plans. These might be plans developed by civic or neighborhood associations, those developed under a federal program like Weed and Seed, or those developed by one or more DC agencies such as the Metropolitan Police Department Partnerships for Problem Solving or the Healthy Family Thriving Community collaboratives. At the beginning of the Neighborhood Planning process, existing plans will be gathered so recommendations that have not yet been implemented can be examined to determine if they are still appropriate and, if so, action plans developed.

- **Current Priorities.** Things change. Problems arise. Leadership changes. Opportunities become clear. Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans will not be driven by past plans, but informed by past plans. Rather, residents will identify current priorities that need to be addressed and those will be the cornerstones of the Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan.

What are the Steps of the Neighborhood Planning Process?

The steps in a typical SNAP process are shown in the process flowchart below. The first step starts with citizens. The NPC shares information about the Neighborhood Planning Initiative with citizens, community leaders, and other stakeholders. Some of these individuals become members of a citizen steering committee which works with the NPC to develop a meeting and workshop schedule and an outreach strategy. This leads to the first major event, the essential ingredients workshop.
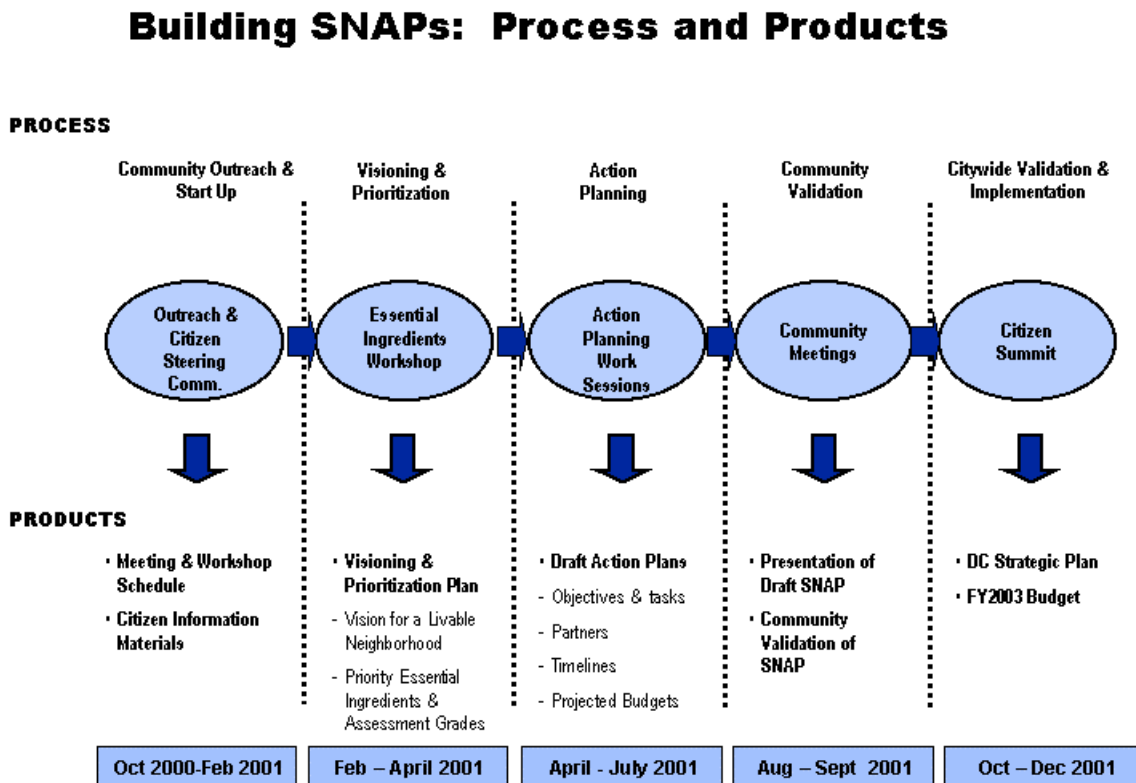
The Essential Ingredients Workshop is critical to ensuring that priorities included in the strategic neighborhood action plan for each of the city's 39 neighborhood clusters is derived from these local perspectives, values and culture. This workshop will engage neighborhood stakeholders to identify the essential ingredients needed to strengthen or preserve their neighborhood as a healthy, livable community and assess their neighborhood according to how well it is performing with respect to each of these ingredients. These day-long events bring together a wide range of citizens to develop their vision and essential ingredients for a healthy livable neighborhood, assess how they are doing as a neighborhood on each essential ingredient. The first Essential Ingredient was held in January in Cluster 25, which centers on the H Street corridor. It drew over a 100 people and was a great success. Essential ingredient workshops in the other clusters will be completed by April, 2001.

The third step is to hold action planning work sessions whose goal is to develop strategies and action plans to address priority essential ingredients. These will be scheduled from April through July, 2001. The vision, essential ingredients, and action plans will be compiled into draft SNAPs and presented back to the community in late summer and early fall for review and validation.

The compilation of SNAP plans will be an essential element of the material presented to citizens at Citizen Summit II.

Figure 3-4

Building SNAPs: Process and Products

Building SNAPs: Process and Products

PROCESS

Community Outreach & Start Up	Visioning & Prioritization	Action Planning	Community Validation	Citywide Validation & Implementation
Outreach & Citizen Steering Comm.	Essential Ingredients Workshop	Action Planning Work Sessions	Community Meetings	Citizen Summit

PRODUCTS

· Meeting & Workshop Schedule · Citizen Information Materials	· Visioning & Prioritization Plan - Vision for a Livable Neighborhood - Priority Essential Ingredients & Assessment Grades	· Draft Action Plans - Objectives & tasks - Partners - Timelines - Projected Budgets	· Presentation of Draft SNAP · Community Validation of SNAP	· DC Strategic Plan · FY2003 Budget
Oct 2000-Feb 2001	Feb – April 2001	April - July 2001	Aug – Sept 2001	Oct – Dec 2001

Linking Neighborhood Planning and Implementation Resources

One of the questions citizens appropriately ask about planning is whether there will be resources to support the implementation of their ideas. It is expected that funds for implementation will come from three sources:

- Already appropriated and committed local funds that can be committed to the task;
- Locally-generated resources such as funds from local merchants that are used for activities ranging from neighborhood cleanups to playground rejuvenation; and
- Funds from agencies and capital improvement budgets that are already targeted for addressing neighborhood-level issues.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, some requests will not be immediately funded but will be fed-forward into the upcoming citywide strategic planning and budgeting cycle.

Linking Neighborhood Planning and the Target Neighborhood Investment Initiative

One of the major new initiatives in the Office of Planning is the Neighborhood Target Area Initiative. Under this Initiative the Neighborhood Target Area Investment Program is an asset-based approach to community development to spur revitalization through public and private

investments within neighborhoods with the greatest potential to demonstrate measurable impact in a three-year period. Five to six specific neighborhoods will be selected, through a careful analysis of the data, for the likelihood that concentrated investments will leverage significant private investment and have a revitalizing impact. Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans will often provide an impetus for the work in target areas under this initiative.

The Investment program starts with the premise that the District and its neighborhoods compete for buyers and investments by people who choose to live, work and be entertained here. The decision of homeowners to paint or not paint the exterior of a home, to add a deck or room addition, to replace dated windows and to upgrade a kitchen are all visible and measurable signs of residents investing their time and money into their community. These simple acts provide insight into the economic vitality of a neighborhood.

This Investment program will stimulate changes that restore and sustain neighborhood confidence by focusing on interventions that are carefully tailored to strengthen civic involvement, increase community pride, raise housing values and increase the number of homeowners. By systematically encouraging positive neighborhood-directed investment, more communities will successfully compete to attract and retain neighbors able and willing to invest time, money, and effort where they live.

What Neighborhoods Are Eligible?

District resources and energy will be focused in areas of 10 to 15 blocks each. The type of resources and strategies associated with this program will work best in neighborhoods that are changing rapidly or underperforming. The program and its resources are aimed at neighborhoods where there is active neighborhood involvement and where specific development opportunities exist to maximize housing and retail development potential.

Generally, there are two types of neighborhoods that are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this opportunity, emerging and transitional.

- Emerging neighborhoods are those that are under-performing based on their market potential. With the right push and appropriate investment tools, these neighborhoods are in a position to see marked improvement in a relatively short period of time.
- Transitional, fast developing neighborhoods are subject to rapid home sales, rising property values, and displacement pressures. Without the appropriate intervention, homeownership opportunities in these neighborhoods could quickly become unattainable for much of the District's residents.

The Neighborhood Target Area Investment Initiative will be a key to having high visibility impact in select neighborhoods. Further, this Initiative will not only attend to the economic issues, but will work to assure existing residents are supported as well.

What Happens after the First Round of Neighborhood Planning is Completed?

As indicated above, the first round of Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans will be completed by September 2001. Once the initial plans are completed, each neighborhood cluster will receive implementation support. This bolsters the program's emphasis on supporting program implementation. Some neighborhood clusters, such as those that are a part of the Neighborhood Targeted Area Investment Strategy, will receive more significant support and additional planning which addresses issues more deeply in the community. In addition, there will be an annual

review by citizens of the SNAP plan, which includes a progress report as well as an examination of the need for any mid-term corrections.

Conclusion

The Neighborhood Action Initiative is comprised of a powerful set of ideas and actions that are focused on two critical objectives – engaging citizens in the governance of their city and building a high-performance local government organization. The initiative's goals are to rebuild citizen trust in government and deliver needed services with a focus on results.